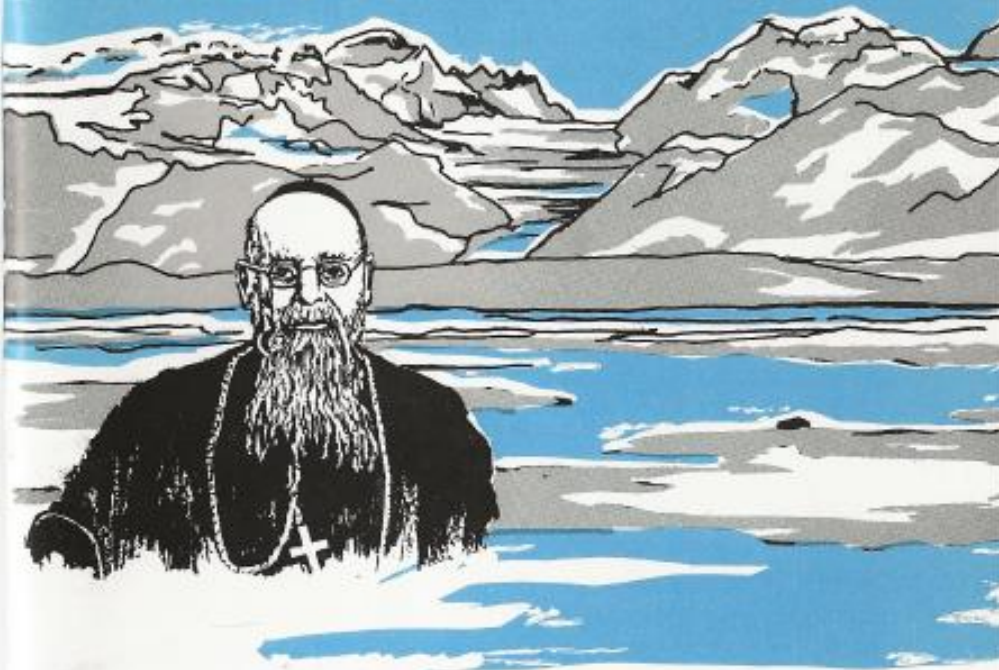


ARCTIC APOSTLE

Bishop Arsene Turquetil, O.M.I.



By Reverend Michael J. Devaney, O.M.I.

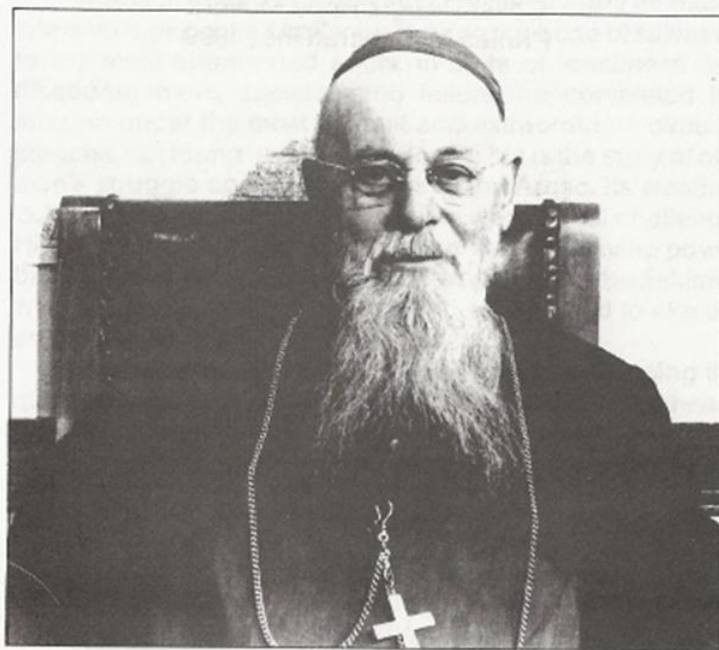


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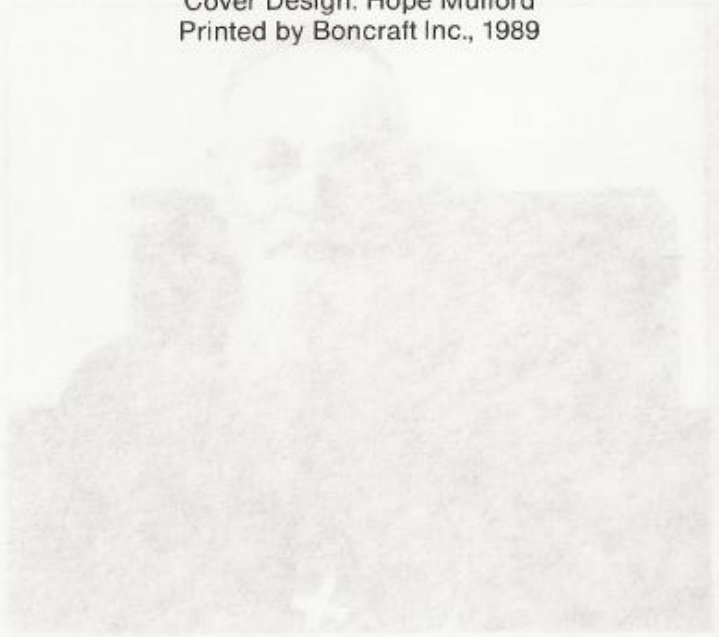
Rev. Michael J. Devaney, O.M.I.



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FOREWORD

The golden pages of Church history and the ones of which the Church is most proud, were written by the missionary priests, brothers, sisters, and laymen who have followed the command of Christ to go forth and teach all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The Church prizes these pages because they are written in the blood, sweat, and tears of those who have given up homeland, mother, father, and all possessions to carry the name of Christ to the most abandoned souls. Those pages tell of the successes and failures, as well as the discouragements and the hopes of our Catholic Missions.

This is the story of one young Oblate of Mary Immaculate who took up the challenge to bring the hope of salvation to the most abandoned souls. In spite of loneliness and discouragement, success and failure, he completed his mission under the most difficult and extraordinary circumstances, not found in other missions. This is the story of one man's struggle against the rigors of the Arctic. Its weather, culture, language, and its paganism were a real challenge. His zeal for Christ and His message was the driving power that took him to the Arctic waste to work among the Eskimos who roamed the top of the world to survive and to eke out an existence.

What possessed him to commit his life to bringing the message of Christ to the Eskimo? Something in the heart! Read his story to find out what was in his heart.

Fr. Michael J. Gossney, D.M.I.

INTRODUCTION

This is the story of a great missionary in the Far North, Bishop Arsene Turquetil, O.M.I. Perhaps his life can be summed up in a few words written by another Arctic missionary a short time ago:

We cannot hope to accomplish any more than is possible. The frozen fields of the North are being plowed and planted this day. The harvest is a matter of the future. I know I shall not see it. It is enough to realize that I am sharing in the work of the vineyard of the Master by my labors and my sufferings, for I know that in His ineffable Goodness I shall receive a bountiful reward for it all, a reward so glorious that the mere hope of it outshines to obscurity the paltry things of this life; yes, even the taste of spoiled fish at 70 below zero.*

The life of Bishop Turquetil, O.M.I., who devoted his life to the conversion of the Eskimo, is the story of one such missionary hero. Only childlike faith and trust in God enabled this trail blazer to endure the trials and obstacles he encountered among a people characterized by seasoned missionaries as "unconvertible."

*Mary Immaculate Magazine.

CHILDHOOD

Arsene Turquetil, born June 3, 1876 in the coastal town of Revers in Normandy, France, was the youngest in a family of five. His father, Felix, a mill hand in a nearby city, labored hard to support his growing family. Long hours at the mill coupled with the cost of travel permitted him to be with his family only on weekends. But these weekends were happy days for the little household. Yet it was during just such a weekend that tragedy struck and changed the life of little Arsene. One day, as his sister played near the kitchen stove unnoticed, to satisfy a natural curiosity, she reached up and seized the handle of a pot of boiling fat. The quick action of the mother to save her child was futile. Both mother and daughter were killed.

Unable to care for the children, Felix Turquetil committed his older boys to the home of neighbors where they were able to work and provide for themselves. Little Arsene was entrusted to the charity of religious in charge of a home for the aged.

In addition to performing the small tasks assigned to him about the protectory, Arsene attended school each day. In particular it was afterwards recalled that he enjoyed the stories Sister told—especially the ones she narrated about the missions. One day, just before the dismissal bell rang, Arsene asked if all the people in the world knew about God. The lad was told that they did not. Then, much to the astonishment of the teacher and to the amusement of his classmates he countered, "Well, then, I will go and tell them."

A Vocation

The sisters were not unaware of the boy's inclination to the Missionary priesthood. But they were taken aback when eight-year-old Arsene told them in the most matter of fact way that he had made up his mind to be a priest. That's all there was to it. So in time all arrangements were made. In

June, 1886, he set off for the seminary at Villiers le Sac. Arsene was attracted to seminary life from the start and, what was a good sign, he made friends quickly. In no time at all this jovial, lively, black-haired boy had captured the hearts of all.

Barely a few months had passed when the rector began to realize that Arsene was an inveterate prankster. None was excepted. The natural gift of an excellent memory marked him as an exceptional student. But this gift also afforded him ample time to invent pranks and to select his next victim. One afternoon, for example, the prefect of discipline never took notice of a pad of absentee slips missing from his desk. Then as now, it was required to present one of these to the professor when one absented himself from class or missed a day of school. In one week alone the increased circulation of these slips was so great that the poor prefect couldn't remember signing so many. Arsene's generosity in passing out the slips was eventually detected but a cardboard back was all the evidence that remained.

At the end of his first year an Oblate Bishop from Ceylon honored the seminary and the boys with a talk. After the applause, His Excellency asked for volunteers. Arsene stood up and begged to go at once. He even asked the Bishop if he should change his clothes for the trip. A look of bitter disappointment beclouded the young enthusiast's face when he saw the Bishop's coach pull away without him.

In all earnestness Arsene confided to his spiritual director that he wanted to become a missionary. The priest, a wise and indulgent old man, first chuckled at the boy's remark. Then he chided him,

"You can't even stop talking for two minutes. How in the world can you ever expect to be a missionary — maybe even a martyr?"

Arsene took his advice to heart. To be a missionary was his sole dream in life. Therefore he swore that he would be still, that he would obey every rule. Within hours Arsene's classmates were trying to decide whether they ought to tell the rector that their classmate was sick. The rector, too, had noted the sudden change and discounted it as just another proof that the youthful seminarian was hatching some infer-

nal plot. Then when weeks lengthened into months it became obvious to all that Arsene's changed character was genuine, that he was destined to become the most serious student the seminary had ever enrolled.

MAJOR SEMINARIAN

Early in his second year of Philosophy at the Sulpician seminary in Paris, Arsene first came into intimate contact with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. A retreat given by Father Cassian Augier, O.M.I., recently returned from the African missions, reawakened the young man's interest. The stories and descriptions the Oblate gave of missionary work in that country intrigued him. Hesitant at first, his fellow classmates, who better than his professors knew his zeal for foreign missions, encouraged him to speak up.

The First Oblates

Arsene's yearning to enlist as an Oblate increased as Father Augier related how the Oblates were founded in Aix, France in 1816 by a French nobleman, Charles Joseph Eugene De Mazenod. De Mazenod, the missionary explained, had observed the frightful spiritual decay that had taken place in France after the ravages of the great revolution of 1789. To offset this decay he organized a small group of priests whose dedicated mission was "to preach the Gospel to the poor." He went on to tell how De Mazenod and his associates traveled to churches throughout France preaching missions, how they brought Christ to the spiritually impoverished in prisons, how they visited hospitals, knocked at the hovels of the poor. In conclusion Father Augier described the miraculous growth of the little Congregation. Ten years after its foundation in 1816, it was solemnly approved by Pope Leo II; fifteen years later in 1841, Bishop Bourget of Montreal, on his way to Rome, visited Paris and asked the Oblates to come to his dioceses. Father

De Mazenod, the founder, accepted, and the first Oblate foreign missionaries left for Canada in 1841. Arsene Turquetil never dreamed that he was destined to add one more link to the chain of Oblate missions that today encircles the world.

After a year of thought and consultation with his spiritual director, Arsene Turquetil entered the Oblate Novitiate at Angers, France. This canonical year of trial and spiritual growth proved rewarding to the novice destined by God to be a vessel of election to carry the Gospel to the most abandoned souls of the Arctic. At Angers his love for the Northern Missions was kindled. It was here that he saw the very missionaries whom he wanted to imitate.

Father Charles S. Matthews, O.M.I., a fellow novice of Arsene Turquetil has written well of Arsene's ambition to go to the North.

"He never talked about the 'Great North' as he called the Mackenzie mission, without a thrill of melodrama in his voice. Any suggestion that he might be appointed to some local college or parish used to excite him. He would at once burst out: 'If that is the case, I leave the novitiate tomorrow.'"

When Arsene had completed his novitiate, he was assigned to the Oblate Major Seminary at Liege, Belgium, while his classmate, Father Matthews, was sent to Ottawa. Later Father Matthews wrote that this perturbed Arsene. He concluded that Father Matthews obedience was a step toward the "Great North," whereas his own appointment to Leige seemed to indicate work in Europe.

The years in the major seminary passed quickly and when the day of Ordination arrived on December 23, 1899, his lifelong dream was fulfilled. The exercise of his priesthood filled with joy his last year in the seminary as a student priest. With the celebration of each Mass his generosity and love of God grew and deepened. While he continued to hope that God would call him up for service in the "Great North," he was content to fill his place in the divine will.

FIRST OBEDIENCE

When the "obediences" arrived from the general house in July of 1900, Father Turquetil received his appointment to Saskatchewan, an Oblate province in western Canada. Is it necessary to describe the joy of the young priest, or to relate how it was experienced by his whole community? Without delay he began to make preparations for the long trip.

Soon after his ship had docked in Southampton, England, in August, Father Turquetil transferred to a German freighter Montreal bound. It was a trying trip for the missionary. Neither the crew nor the three passengers aboard spoke a word of French; much less Latin. Later, reminiscing on this trip, he would remark that such a situation must have been intended as a foretaste of the language hurdle he would have to take in his foreign mission field.

When Father Turquetil learned that he would have a week's delay in Montreal, he took the opportunity to visit a classmate, Father Matthews. Without delay the two priests packed their equipment and spent the free time hunting and fishing on the outskirts of a nearby town. This holiday ended all too soon.

The hazardous trip of several weeks to Saskatchewan ended at the Province's central mission, where its superior invited Father Turquetil to remain a few days before setting out for his assignment at St. Peter's Mission, located on Reindeer Lake. Impatient, however, to reach his destination, he declined the invitation and left for the Mission the very next day.

SASKATCHEWAN

Reindeer Lake, some four hundred miles southeast of Lake Athabaska, is one hundred fifty miles long. Encircled by pine-covered points and by small bays, this lake region was to be Father Turquetil's home for the next ten years. Large numbers of Dene Indians, a tribe of the Montagnais, had settled about the lake. White settlers, discouraged by the barren soil, did not migrate that far north. Father

Alphonse Gaste, O.M.I., had established this mission and had worked among the Indians for more than thirty years. He was well known among the Montagnais and the Eskimos, for it was he who had brought peace to these warring tribes and had encouraged the Eskimo hunters to trade their pelts at Reindeer Lake. He hoped that some day a mission would be established among the Eskimos. For this reason Father Gaste was especially solicitous in preparing the young priest for the dangers that the frozen wastes held for the unwary and the unlearned.

Learning the means of survival in the Arctic was slow but Father Turquetil's eagerness rendered the task easy. When the young priest had progressed far enough, Father Gaste permitted him to make a yearly visit to the Eskimos. He himself had made these visits during the previous three decades. Since the Eskimo did not stay in one spot, Father Turquetil would make contact with a small group. He would then travel, hunt and live with them a few months before returning to St. Peter's. There he would report to the old priest all that had happened. Little by little the Eskimos learned to respect their young missionary, or "the bearded one," as they called him, and watched for his visits.

THE ESKIMO

The Eskimo is a man of mystery. His history, based solely on oral tradition is so interwoven with myth and legend that his real beginning and his movements over the centuries cannot be traced. Called Eskimo by the Indians because he is an "eater of raw meat," he was first thought to be Japanese because of his small stature and oriental features.

Some anthropologists believe that the Eskimo migrated across the top of the world from northern Asia, yet the reason for his migration is not known—perhaps it was for adventure, perhaps the hope for new lands.

He ekes out his very existence from the frozen tundra of the Arctic, where neither trees nor plants flourish. He is compelled to stalk the caribou, the seal, and the polar bear

across the endless miles of ice and snow. Starvation is all too often his lot. Hardship and experience over the centuries have hardened the Eskimo into a clever, independent, self-sufficient and self-governing aborigine. In his own land he is supreme. He is content to wander about the top of the world like an abandoned soul.

Father Gaste and Father Turquetil spoke frequently of the Eskimos. Father Gaste knew that he was too old to go to these people, but the youthful Father Turquetil had life ahead of him. The old priest wisely determined to impress a deep love for them in his heart. The day was bound to come when Missionaries would establish missions among the Eskimos. Father Gaste planned to ready his young assistant for that day.

PRIEST OF THE ESKIMOS

Mail arrived infrequently at the Mission outpost on Reindeer Lake. Early in 1911, among the few letters that arrived for the Fathers, there was a letter from the Bishop. It contained the long-awaited news. Bishop Charlebois, newly consecrated Vicar Apostolic of Keewatin, was seriously interested in the conversion of the Eskimos. The letter asked Father Turquetil to investigate the possibilities and to decide upon a suitable location for the new mission.

Father Turquetil set out for Churchill by dogsled on Wednesday of Easter Week. The year was 1911. Fifteen days later, after he had discussed the matter with competent authorities, he sent a cable to Bishop Charlebois: "Mission possible, even necessary and urgent." Chesterfield Inlet was the new location chosen for the proposed mission. The site, buried in snow ten months out of the year, was located on the western shore of Hudson Bay. It had two advantages. It had a good harbor and it enjoyed a central position in its relation to the Eskimo.

It was while visiting at Churchill that Father Turquetil picked up important information. He learned that the Hudson Bay Company was sending an Eskimo half breed to Chesterfield that summer to stake out land for a new trading

post. It was built in 1912. He hoped that Bishop Charlebois would take immediate action.

Father Turquetil returned to Reindeer Lake and resumed his work. There he waited with expectancy Bishop Charlebois' answer to his cable. A month later the letter arrived by special messenger. It instructed Father Turquetil to proceed to Montreal and to gather supplies for a new mission. He was advised that the journey to Chesterfield would begin that very summer.

TRIP TO CHESTERFIELD

There were tears in Father Gaste's eyes as he bade Father Turquetil farewell. He was confident that the mission among the Eskimos for which he had hoped and prayed more than thirty years would soon become a reality. The old priest mourned the loss of his dear friend, but he knew that such a feat demanded strong faith and courage, and he knew that Father Turquetil had both.

Turning for one last look at the pastor and a group of Indians standing before St. Peter's mission, Father Turquetil waved goodbye. With the Eskimo huskies straining in their traces, the heavy sled raced over the snow. The lonely three-week trek to Montreal began. All was silent save for the hiss of the sled speeding over the hard-packed snow and for an occasional whelp from the dogs.

Missionaries for years had said that such an attempt was impossible. But Father Turquetil conjured up visions of the future mission he would establish among the Eskimos. Inside his parka he carried a precious letter from his Bishop. It granted him permission to erect the Cross and set up an altar among these people. Others, he knew, had hoped and had labored unsuccessfully to convert the Eskimos. The Russian Orthodox had tried and failed. Protestant missionaries had made an attempt. They, too, had failed. All had abandoned the project as hopeless.

Father Turquetil realized that this new venture would involve obstacles that were almost insuperable. The great-

est of these would be to win the esteem of these people who considered the white man to be weak and stupid. He would have to pit his acquired skill in hunting and his skill in fishing against the native skill of the Eskimos. To do this it meant he must travel in sub zero temperatures. He would have to face the rage of blinding blizzards. He would be compelled to find his way across the tundra, across frozen lakes where a compass is useless due to the magnetic disturbances of the north pole. If ever he were to reach these forgotten souls it would mean voluntary exile in a land of desolation and death.

And what of the language? A fur trader was just able to get by with a scant knowledge of Eskimo. One must master the language if he were to bring Christ to the Eskimos whose lives were ruled by superstition, by immorality, by fear of the "Great Spirit." In the crisp, still nights beneath the stars, the young missionary prayed, thought and planned.

The next few months were spent in Montreal gathering supplies and making appeals. Supplying a mission in the frozen Arctic is far different from supplying missions in temperate climates. The Arctic Missionary must bring everything. Food, clothing, medicine, oil for lamps, coal and wood are just a few of the items which are essential. A mission simply cannot survive in a land where everything is wanting unless it is completely equipped with the necessities of life.

The short, black-bearded priest in shabby black trousers became a familiar sight to the docks at Montreal. Each item on his seemingly endless list was crated for shipping. Great care was taken to number and to address each crate so as to simplify the drawing up of the bill of lading required by the shipping company. Father Turquetil even supervised the packing of special items to insure compliance with shipping regulations. Due to his supervision, tons of supplies were readied for shipping a whole week in advance.

Then the excitement and the expectation of the July 9 departure date was dampened when the Hudson Bay Company advised the priest that the sailing had been set back two weeks. The officials were trying to prevent the building of the mission before winter set in. Father Turquetil, familiar with the company's lamentable attitude toward Catholic

Missions, wondered. Several days later another message arrived. It found fault with the arrangements he had made for shipping the mission supplies.

This matter had hardly been adjusted when an ultimatum arrived stating that the company would carry the supplies on the condition that if the boat was unable to reach Chesterfield Inlet, the missionary would be landed with his cargo anywhere in the Hudson Bay Region. To the surprise of the Company officials, the paper was received at their office signed in the affirmative. Father Turquetil assured his worried Bishop that the ship would reach Chesterfield Inlet at any cost, for there were plenty of Eskimo fox furs waiting to be shipped from that point.

The "Nascopie" was a beautiful sight to Father Turquetil as it lay at anchor on the morning of July 24th. He and his assistant, Father La Blanc, O.M.I., climbed the gangplank as the last derrick-load of cargo was being lowered into the hold. A hazardous trip was about to begin, but these were not even mentioned in the missionary's report:

"Finally we started on July 24th; on the 26th fog detained us at Fathers' Point. On land the bells of St. Anne were ringing; on board the siren wailed for three whole days. Then the fog lifted and we were on our way again. Stops were made at six trading posts for food and supplies and at long last after forty-two days of navigation, we arrived at Chesterfield Inlet on September 3rd, the feast of the Mother of Good Shepherd."

Crew members worked feverishly the day of the landing, unloading Company and mission supplies. Father Turquetil, when he had left instructions for Father La Blanc to supervise the unloading, set out to settle on a good location for their mission. Much to his annoyance, he found that all the ideal spots were marked with pegs bearing the letters "H.B.C." (Hudson Bay Company). Ironically, these letters were referred to by traders as "Here before Christ." Heedless of the markings, the priest chose a level stretch of white sand, frozen solid. There would be no need of a foundation. Just beyond this site was a lake of fresh water. As Father Turquetil looked about, he saw the hut of his neighbor less than five hundred yards away. He knew who it was. It was

none other than that of the half breed sent by the Company the summer before to set up a trading post. Impatient to tell Father La Blanc of his find, he hurried back to the landing. It was a forlorn sight that met his eyes.

When he had arrived at the dock where the "Nascopie" had anchored, Father Turquetil found the mission supplies in confusion. Cases were scattered over a wide area. Some of them had even been mixed up with the Company supplies. Poor Father La Blanc sat in the midst of the cases, bewildered and discouraged. A group of Eskimo children stood nearby smiling and unconcerned. Father Turquetil tried to explain to them his situation and asked them to help him. At first the children clad in seal skin did not answer, but stood admiring the missionary's long black beard. Then one of the group turned and ran toward the cluster of tents on the hillock a short distance away. Soon Eskimo men and women, as well as boys and girls, proud of their new visitors, joined in transporting the supplies to the mission site. Six hours later, hundreds of cases, large and small, grew into assorted mountains. When the work was finished, the two tired missionaries thanked their fur-clad neighbors and then crawled exhausted into their first residence—a tent.

DISCOURAGEMENTS

Early next morning, the two missionaries accompanied by four Eskimo helpers, set to work building. Within four days they had the roof completed. Then troubles shuffled in. Slowly, the short, stocky half-breed came up to where Father Turquetil was busily sawing and stood silent for a moment. The priest, aware of the trader's presence, ignored him and continued to saw wood and to smoke his pipe as if no one were present.

"Ah, you are getting ahead," remarked the half-breed.

"Yes, and you?" retorted Father Turquetil.

"I am afraid to waste the lumber; I know nothing about building, and do not know where to begin. Could you come and show my men how to make the foundations?"

Father Turquetil thought for a moment.

"Certainly, I will help, but tell me, were you not sent here last year to mark out the land for the Company?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Did you not receive orders to take all the land and block me?" The priest questioned further.

An uncomfortable silence followed.

"I know nothing about it; I did the best I could and I see that my stakes and my paint are on the rocks that comprise the land you have chosen."

"Well," answered the priest, "remove your stakes, smear up the 'H.B.C.'s, and I will help you and your men build the post."

The half-breed complied with the priest's wish. Father Turquetil in turn helped to build the Company's trading post. Before the week was out, the windows, doors, roof and double-boarding on the outside of the mission were completed. The interior work on the building was all that remained.

No time had been wasted by the missionaries in meeting the language problem. As their Eskimo helpers pointed out the different objects and pronounced the words, the phonetic spelling of the words was written on boards, joists, or rafters. Before they began the second boarding on the outside of the building they had collected over two hundred words for their dictionary. After a night or two of study, they tried some of them on the inhabitants. At first astonished at the correct pronunciation, the Eskimos nodded that they understood. More often than not they could not restrain their laughter.

The Eskimo language, because of its unique word formation and its sentence structure, usually takes between three and four years of study before one is able to speak it with facility. Even then a person is only capable of being understood by his own people, for the dialects vary with each section.

When they arrived at Chesterfield the two missionaries had no grammar, no dictionary, not even an alphabet. So an inventive Father Turquetil began to devise characters to express the more difficult sounds of the language. In the

years he spent learning the language, not only did he perfect a dictionary, but he composed a grammar for the missionaries who would one day follow him. It must be remembered that while the written language is the same, the vocabulary differs. Father Turquetil did not preach his first sermon until Pentecost Sunday, in 1915, four years after his arrival. Much had to be accomplished before that day came.

In the months that followed, the missionaries hunted and fished with the Eskimos. They were compelled to augment their supply of canned goods with fresh game. Among their winter supplies was a large amount of walrus to serve as food for the huskies. These dogs are the missionaries' sole means of transportation during the long winters. The huskies' main food is a daily chunk of walrus or fish.

The hard work of the missionaries to interest the people in religion seemed in vain. The Eskimos would come to church, to be sure, but they only came to jeer and to ridicule the "bearded one and his God." Father Turquetil wrote later how like the Jews, they mocked Our Lord on the Cross, saying: "If he had been so very good, why didn't the people stop his enemies from killing Him?" The Blessed Mother alone was spared. Before the station depicting Mary at the foot of the Cross, the Eskimo women would press their little ones to their bosoms, and voice their feelings: "If they had done that to you, I would have killed them." It was a cry that came from the heart; a hope for the future. "We shall have them; it may take time, but we shall have them."

Each week the missionaries prepared a little instruction for this pagan congregation. As soon as the ceremonies were over the Eskimos would go directly to the trading post for a chat with the half-breed about what the priest had said. The reply of the pagan half-breed was always the same:

"Oh, the bearded one told you that; he is crazy. No one wanted him in civilization. He could not find a wife so he goes everywhere in a woman's clothes (the cassock). If you listen to him and follow him, it is just too bad for you, and here you will not be received at the store...so chose."

With nothing to offer but themselves and the teachings of Christ's Church, it seemed useless for the missionaries to remain where they were not wanted. Thus the first year

passed. The second and third succeeded it without a conversion.

But rather than yield to discouragement the missionaries employed their time studying the dispositions of the people and their pagan beliefs. They learned that the Eskimo fasted for the dead, and felt a close union with them. Infanticide, which accounted for the small number of Eskimos, particularly girls, was not considered murder because of their belief that a baby was not given a spirit until eight days after birth and therefore to kill it before that time was no offense against the spirit.

On every occasion that presented itself, Father Turquetil spoke of these practices. He condemned infanticide on the one hand, and on the other hand he explained that their practice of fasting for the dead was akin to that of the Church. The Church prayed for the dead, and taught that the good went to a place called heaven, where they saw God. During his explanation of Heaven, Father Turquetil saw one of his interested listeners stand to raise an objection:

"It is all right for you to look to heaven and go there because you are thin and can climb up; but I am too fat and would only fall back down."

The spring thaw brought familiar reverberations of breaking ice on the Bay. Soon the "Nascopie" would bring fresh supplies and mail. It was an annual event that brought excitement to everyone. There had been no mail from France during the war years but, as the boat dropped anchor in 1915, the mail pouch marked "Chesterfield" carried news from France that was destined to change the life of Father La Blanc. When he had opened the letter with its familiar stamp and address the priest learned that two of his brothers had been killed in the war and that a third was imprisoned in Germany. Unable to restrain his tears at the plight of his family, he began to weep.

An Eskimo saw him and went to tell the others what he had seen. Father Turquetil, realizing that an Eskimo considers tears as a sign of weakness and a womanly trait, tried to explain to the people the great sorrow that had come upon his companion, but they would not listen. The respect Father La Blanc had earned among the Eskimos as a hunter and a

man of equal status was lost. Later Father Turquetil wrote:

"The blow was hard for Father La Blanc, and he fell ill. Sometime later he felt better and was able to resume his duties. He then gave his first sermon. His best friends among the Eskimos laughed at him and mimicked a weeping child. That was the last straw. He left by boat in 1916, to die at sea on September 21st of that same year."

Brother Prime Girard, O.M.I., a young, twenty-seven-year old Oblate Lay brother, arrived that September 7 to replace Father Le Blanc at the Chesterfield mission. He carried a special message for Father Turquetil from Bishop Charlebois who, convinced by many that the Chesterfield attempt was doomed to failure, wrote that the mission was a waste of time and that the talents of a good missionary would be more profitable elsewhere.

Father Turquetil could appreciate his superior's decision. Only a short time before it was learned that two other Oblates of Mary Immaculate, sent to the Eskimos at Coppermine, had been brutally murdered. Father La Blanc, broken in spirit, had to leave. Father Turquetil alone remained. This last blow seemed to sound the death knell of the effort to convert the Eskimo. Yet, there was a tiny ray of hope. The natives had improved morally since his arrival. But, if he left now, he would lose all he had gained. Father Turquetil took his pen and sat at the rough table. He would ask for just one more year. If there were no conversions by the end of that time, he would close the mission. He folded the letter, placed it in an envelope, and pondered the hardships of the past four years.

As a friend of the Eskimos, Father Turquetil was allowed a place in their camp. He proved to them that he could endure hardships as well as as they could. He lived with them; with them he ate fish frozen so hard that it took two stones to break it. He endured the sting of the frozen morsel as he ate it in sub-zero temperatures. He faced starvation on the trail. Once he even ate a live fish, he was so hungry.

In time of famine he had hunted and stalked the polar bear. He had snared the seal and the walrus, and he had followed the swift caribou until he had dropped it with his rifle. In these barren wastes an accurate bullet often spelled

the difference between a meal or starvation, between life or death.

In raging blizzards—blizzards that lasted for days—he welcomed the warmth and the comfort of a sealed igloo. At times he had accepted Eskimo hospitality in the form of a choice dish of fish heads and caribou entrails dipped in heated seal oil. These hardships meant nothing. Father Turquetil was ready to wait twenty-five years, if necessary, to win the souls of this stubborn people for Christ.

He knew that he had one year left to gain a foothold in Chesterfield Inlet or to lose all that he had accomplished. He prayed to his Immaculate Mother Mary, asking her to intercede for him and to send the grace of conversion to his Eskimos. Perhaps it did sound senseless, thought Father Turquetil as he lay awake that night. To those far away it probably did seem senseless to chase after six thousand souls over a million and a half square miles of ice and snow. But, then, he remembered God had sent His only Son from heaven to save all men. Surely these poor souls had every right to share in that Redemption. Father Turquetil never once regretted his coming to this desolate land. The Arctic was exactly what he had wanted. When questioned by his Superior as to where he would like to go as a missionary, he had replied, "No matter where, provided it is pagan, hot or cold country, but not Europe."

Marked by no sign of conversion, 1916 was slowly slipping by. Then a strange event occurred. An Eskimo traveler arrived at the mission in October with two letters for Father Turquetil. Since mail came to Chesterfield once each year by boat, the priest questioned the man but received no satisfactory answers. Years later Father Turquetil wrote:

"I was never able to discover who sent me those two envelopes, nor did I ever understand how the postmaster at Churchill took it upon himself to give these letters to the first person going north, without an inkling as to whether they would ever reach their destination, Chesterfield, more than 600 kilometers from Churchill."

PATRONESS OF MISSIONS

The first packet contained a pamphlet entitled *The Story of A Little Soul*. In it he was delighted to read the biography of a little Carmelite nun, Therese of the Child Jesus, who was from his own diocese, Lisieux, in France. Eagerly, he continued to read the pamphlet. He learned that Therese had always longed to be a missionary, and that she had loved the snow. In the second envelope, Father found dust taken from the grave of the saintly nun. In a flash an inspiration came to him. Perhaps she could help him convert his Eskimos.

That very evening, after having instructed Brother Girard, Father Turquetil invited some of the Eskimos, returning from a hunt, to warm themselves by his fire. They sucked on their old pipes and chatted about the events of the day's expedition. Then Father Turquetil seated himself at a small harmonium and began to play. The Eskimos gathered around the instrument and watched, fascinated by the movements of the Missionary's hands and feet. Brother Girard went behind them, and taking a pinch of dust from the packet, sprinkled some on the thick black hair of each. That night, long after their visitors had left, the two Oblates of Mary Immaculate knelt in prayer before the small wooden tabernacle, imploring Our Lord to give them souls.

The following Sunday morning, as Father Turquetil was preparing the altar for Mass, he saw a group of Eskimos coming toward the mission without harpoons or guns. They seemed unusually happy as they seated themselves on the small benches before the altar. All was quiet. Father Turquetil began Mass. As a rule, the group jeered and laughed at the "bearded one and his God," but, as the Holy Sacrifice progressed, the priest was astounded at the quiet, reverent attitude of the Eskimos.

As he turned from the Gospel book to give the sermon, fourteen uncovered heads were turned to him, and in the face of each he saw an eagerness that appalled him at first. When the Mass concluded, those who had been sprinkled with the dust a few days before came in a group to speak with the priest. The oldest and leader of the group, a thick-

set man named Tuni, spoke up:

"Bearded one, we knew that you were telling the truth, but we did not want to listen. Now our sins frighten us. Can you take them away?"

Father Turquetil, thinking it was a joke, and not sure of what he heard, asked them why they were not hunting walrus on such a fine day, when the wind was just right. Tuni spoke up again.

"Can you take away our sins?"

The priest, seeing the seriousness with which the Eskimo spoke, answered:

"Yes, of course, through Baptism."

He explained the Sacrament, briefly and simply. When he was finished, another in the group spoke up:

"Teach us how to make the sign of the cross correctly, and how to kneel and join our hands. Jesus must be satisfied with us."

An astonished missionary watched the little fur-clad group of Eskimos leave the mission. Little Therese had sent the first of many roses to the mission at Chesterfield. He whispered a prayer to the little saint, adding in his own characteristic words, "Keep on, little girl, you are a fine missionary."

Sunday evening, as the priest sat reading in the soft light of a seal lamp, he heard a knock. Opening the door, he saw Tuni, together with three other Eskimo families.

"Come in," invited the priest.

When all were comfortably seated, Tuni explained, very simply, his reason for coming. He did not want to borrow bullets, nor did he want to take the bearded one's gun; he and the others wanted to be baptized the following morning.

"That is fine," the priest replied, "but do you not realize, Tuni, that I must instruct you before I can baptize you; otherwise you might sin through ignorance after your baptism, and that would grieve Jesus very much. Besides you might run the risk of missing heaven."

The Eskimo paused and looked at the others. "You will instruct us, then?"

"I do not know," replied the missionary. "You will be leaving shortly for fishing expeditions to catch fish for your-

selves and for your dogs. But you cannot clothe yourselves with the skin of fishes.... You need caribou skins. You will go then on the caribou hunt, but when will you return? For Christmas, Easter, or next year?"

Without hesitation, Tuni spoke up: "We will not go to hunt. We will remain here to be instructed and baptized."

"What will you live on?" questioned the priest. "The fish and the caribou will not come up to you here."

Tuni's dark eyes looked into the face of Father Turquetil. It was a questioning gaze.

"Is it true what you told us; that there is One Who is good, Whom we call 'Our Father'?"

"Yes," replied the priest.

"Our Father, as well as yours, eh?" Tuni quickly added.

"Why surely."

"And he loves us?" Tuni continued.

"Certainly," answered the priest.

"Then it is very plain," Tuni said: "You will teach us to pray to Him as He wishes, then He will help us and we shall neither starve nor freeze, and we shall be baptized."

There was no doubting the sincerity of the man's words. The missionary wanted to warn Tuni that he was too enthusiastic, but he agreed that the instructions should begin the next morning with Mass at seven. Catechism would be held from five to six each evening.

Silently the little group nodded agreement and followed Tuni to the door to relate the news to the others. All were ready to follow their leader's decision, and the next evening not a man was missing.

As the weeks lengthened into months, the same interest persisted. A perfect attendance record encouraged the priest. Then, one evening, there was an empty seat next to Tuni. Maktar, his right hand man, was not at the instruction, but his wife was. Father Turquetil wrote of the incident: "I questioned his wife, 'Is your husband ill?' 'No, but he fell in the water and has no clothes!' I gave her a suit of underwear and she departed. A few minutes later she returned, with Maktar dressed in this rather light costume. When the instruction was over, Maktar told me that he was hunting seal near a whirlpool. He spotted his game and killed it with

a single shot. In attempting to retrieve the seal, he fell through the ice. 'I threw the gun and dagger onto the ice, leaned my elbow on the gun, pulled my seal out, seized the dagger and hurled it forward. It stuck fast. I climbed out quickly, dragging the seal; I got undressed and heard the bell for instructions. When I was in the water, I thought of nothing except that I could not miss catechism unless I wanted to miss baptism also."

The eight months of instruction passed quickly, and each day the knowledge of God and seed of faith grew in the hearts of the Eskimos. At last the great day of Baptism arrived. In the presence of the entire village, Father Turquetil poured the saving waters of Baptism on the heads of his new children in God. "It was the birthday of the Catholic Church among the Eskimos." What had seemed to be impossible had been accomplished—a mission among the Eskimos. Prayers of thanks were sent to the little Carmelite nun, and from that day forward she became Father Turquetil's special patroness and powerful advocate for his missionary endeavors in the Arctic.

The Missionary sat down that very night and wrote Bishop Charlebois the good news, telling him the story of the two envelopes he had mysteriously received. Little Therese had saved the mission. Later, through the instrumentality of Father Turquetil and Bishop Charlebois, St. Therese was proclaimed by Pius XI, Patroness of the Missions.

GAINS

Yearly, the Arctic mission continued to prosper and was blessed with new converts. By 1925, there were seventy Eskimo converts to the Faith. Gradually, Father Turquetil was able to establish other mission posts farther north to fill the increasing needs of the Eskimos. To provide medical care for them, he built a three-storied hospital at Chesterfield Inlet. This hospital continues today, staffed by the Grey Nuns.

On July 15, 1925, the Church made Hudson Bay a prefecture and appointed Father Turquetil Prefect Apostolic of that territory, with the title of Monsignor.

Monsignor Turquetil often discussed the need for priests with his faithful friend and companion, Brother Girard. Due to the Monsignor's encouragement, the lay brother began to study Philosophy and Theology, with the priest as his professor. When he had completed his studies, Rome granted a special indult, and the forty-six-year-old lay brother was raised to the dignity of the priesthood in May 1929.

Father Girard was to be of great service to Monsignor Turquetil in establishing new mission posts. In 1936, Monsignor Turquetil appointed him resident pastor of Pond Inlet, the northernmost mission of the Oblates at that time. From this appointment he acquired the title "The Pastor of the North Pole." Father Girard was to enjoy fifteen years in the Arctic mission after his ordination, until poor eyesight forced him to leave his post.

POPE AND MISSIONARY

Early in 1929, Monsignor Turquetil had the privilege of speaking with the "Pope of the Missions," Pius XI. That sunny February morning, as the "Apostle of the Arctic" entered the Vatican apartments, he was greeted by Cardinals Jorio and Bisletti. The former, Prefect of the Congregation of Sacraments, and his confrere, Prefect of Universities and Seminaries, asked him questions about the subject dearest to him, the Arctic missions. A few minutes before his scheduled audience, Monsignor Turquetil was ushered into a private room, and while he was thinking about what he should do and say to the Pontiff, the white-robed figure of Pius XI stood before him. A letter written after the audience is assurance that the Missionary felt no tension in the presence of the Pontiff.

"It was impossible to feel the least constraint, for he is the Pope of the missions, one might say the Pope of all missionaries, as well."



Monsignor Turquetil discussed his plans for the future of his Prefecture, just as though he were speaking with an intimate friend. "The Oblates" remarked the Holy Father, "specialize in the most difficult missions, and yours is the most difficult of all. We know your work well." Toward the end of the thirty-five minute audience, His Holiness paid Monsignor Turquetil the supreme compliment of all: "If I could go and see only one foreign mission, I would go and see yours, Hudson Bay."

LAST YEARS IN THE ARCTIC

Returning to the Arctic with renewed vigor, Monsignor Turquetil brought the special blessing of the Holy Father to his missionaries. Three years of progress under the patronage of the Little Flower followed. Then Monsignor Turquetil received word that the Pope had elevated him to the episcopate. The trip to Montreal for his consecration took two weeks. Bishop George Gauthier of Montreal performed the colorful ceremony in the beautiful Cathedral of St. James in that city. The newly consecrated Bishop became the shepherd of more than 6,000 souls scattered over a million and a half miles of frozen tundra that comprised Hudson Bay.

Missionary work in the Arctic was just beginning. In the years that followed Bishop Turquetil's consecration, American, French and Canadian priests came to help him in his apostolate among the Eskimos. Letters from these men tell of their great love for their spiritual Father, and his dauntless courage. Father James Dunleavy, an American Oblate wrote in 1940:

"Bishop Turquetil has been here (Dorset Mission) almost two weeks and I never really had the opportunity to really know him until this time. His men venerate him and his natives, even the Anglicans and pagans worship him. He is 'grandfather' to all of them. I never met a man who had more or as much absolute confidence in God.

"There never was a kinder man than he. Twenty-eight

years ago, this very day, he founded his first mission. The years are telling on him, but in beginning a new foundation he does not worry. He says that if St. Therese wants it, she will find the means. Of course God and Mary are first consulted, but Therese is the provider. Last year the Bishop wanted to found a mission at Dorset but he had no means to do so. 'If God wants it, Therese will provide.' A letter from an unknown person brought him a check for \$5,000, and so St. Patrick's mission was founded, and after the first year is doing perfectly."

Like Father Dunleavy, there were many other letters paying tribute to Bishop Turquetil, the keynote of each being that nothing is impossible with Faith and trust in God.

Tireless in his zeal among the Eskimos, the long black beard of the beloved Bishop began to turn gray. The seed of Faith planted in the Arctic mushroomed into thirty-two missions and outposts, with more than forty-five Oblate Missionaries. The hospital at Chesterfield was staffed with twenty Grey Nuns, and the number of conversions, upward of two thousand, continued to increase.

In 1936 he could say, "I have seen 87 per cent of the Eskimos in my district converted to Jesus."

LAST YEARS

The Oblate College in Washington, D.C., one of four Oblate Major Seminaries in the States, was the place of retirement chosen by the Missionary Bishop. It was a far cry from the Arctic, to be sure, but some of his visiting missionaries kept him informed on the progress being made among his people.

The hope of every Missionary is to see native vocations. In 1947 Bishop Turquetil was to see the first among his Eskimos. Sister Naya Pelagie, formerly the daughter of a sorcerer whose wife became the first convert to Christianity at the Mission at Eskimo Point, pronounced her vows as a Grey Nun. The old Missionary Bishop considered this the crowning blessing of God upon his work.

DEATH OF BISHOP TURQUETIL

Early in 1955, the doctors diagnosed the Bishop's illness as cancer. Shortly after 11 p.m. on the evening of June 14th, the doctor at Georgetown Hospital, Washington, D.C., examined the Bishop. Moments later the hospital chaplain raised his hand in final absolution. The Apostle of the Arctic was dead.

BIOGRAPHY

A Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate, Fr. Michael Devaney was ordained a priest on June 8, 1957 at the National Shrine in Washington, D.C. After completing his studies at Catholic University and Oblate College, he received his first obedience to St. William's Church in Tewksbury, Massachusetts. This appointment of six years as a parish priest was followed by an assignment to Christian Brothers Academy, Lincroft, New Jersey, where he served as Chaplain to eight hundred high school students until 1967.



The following three years were spent on the Oblate Mission Band preaching parish missions and retreats along the Eastern Seaboard.

In 1969 he was assigned to the Miami Diocese and served six years as an assistant in St. Stephen's Parish in West Hollywood, Florida. When his six year term was ended in August, 1974, Bishop Coleman F. Carroll assigned him to West Palm Beach where he founded and built Mary Immaculate Church. Later in March of 1979 he established St. Rita's mission in Royal Palm Village, Florida.

A native of Buffalo, New York, he was educated by the Sisters of Mercy in St. John Evangelist School, South Buffalo, and the Oblate Fathers in Holy Angels Collegiate Institute on Buffalo's West Side. After spending twenty-three of his twenty-nine years as a priest in parish work, he is presently Pastor of Holy Angels Church in Buffalo, New York.

He has published more than thirty-nine articles in such magazines as Irish Digest, Priest Magazine, and Etudes Oblate and Oblate World, both of which are Oblate publications. He also authored the story of Bishop Arsene Turquetil, an Oblate Missionary in 1929 who achieved the conversion of the first Eskimos in the Arctic to the faith.

Most recent publications are "Letters From a Friend", a Pastor's notes to his people, and "Steeple & Crosses" a History of Holy Angles Church.

The Arctic Apostle, Bishop Arsene Turquetil, O.M.I., was a MISSIONARY OBLATE OF MARY IMMACULATE.

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